

Mansfield Sustainability Committee
Elementary School Siting Recommendations Summary
March 4, 2012

The Mansfield Sustainability Committee has been keenly interested in the issue of school siting since its inception in 2010, around the time that the town was developing options to address current inadequacies and future needs of our elementary schools. Public schools are critical community elements to which substantial community resources are devoted, and their placement both drives future development patterns and has the potential to create a rich set of shared community relationships between public and private land uses. The decision as to where to place a school will have larger community sustainability affects for decades to come.

At that time, the Sustainability Committee researched and prepared a matrix of Sustainability Considerations for School Siting. This matrix, which is included as part of our recommendations, is a list of site features and locational relationships which fall primarily within three main areas:

- Site is in a community-centered location and has connectivity to community amenities and public spaces.
- Site is walk/bike/transit accessible.
- Site is environmentally suitable for development.

These considerations could be applied to renovating or rebuilding on an existing school site or to the search for a new, and potentially more suitable, site. They do not provide any specific site recommendations, but do outline specific site features that will optimize the educational potentials of the school, the environmental performance of the school and the community, and use of existing infrastructure and community resources.

Now in 2012, a more specific course of action has been developed through the School Board's and many others' hard work and careful deliberation. As the option to build two new schools on two of the three existing school sites has been recommended by the School Board, the Sustainability Committee has revisited and applied its School Siting Considerations with this option in mind. In a series of 2 full committee meetings and 2 school siting sub-group meetings over the past month, the committee has developed our recommendations. Ultimately we felt that our most important contribution would involve not limiting site selection to the existing school sites but to think more broadly about how to apply our Sustainability Considerations for School Siting to two community-centered hubs in Mansfield. Our process, which considers sustainability opportunities and constraints of land within 2-mile radius areas around two community hubs, is outlined in the meeting minutes provided with these recommendations. The process did not identify two specific sites, but helped us to arrive at these summarizing conclusions:

1. *The site selection should provide for a northern and southern school.* The significant effort and focus on centering new development and infrastructure around existing municipal and institutional uses in Storrs Center recommends for the siting of a school in this primary

northern hub of the town. The community hub of the Mansfield Center village area and significant residential population in the southern reaches of Mansfield recommends for the siting of a second school in a southern location.

2. *Locations of existing residential populations is a critical factor, but not the only factor in sustainable siting considerations.* Although the group did not come to consensus about the weighting of factors, it strongly agreed that proximity to existing community uses and amenities such as recreational facilities, library, cultural and natural lands, and pedestrian/bike friendly “complete streets” should be given strong consideration, as our Siting Consideration matrix suggests.
3. *If a selected school site does not have surrounding community uses or complete streets, these related improvements and future community/civic features should be planned and incorporated to strengthen the community hub.* As in the case of both the Vinton and Southeast School sites, the state roads they are located along are very lacking in pedestrian and traffic calming amenities. In the case of Vinton School, there is little, if any, other community uses in this area, which is concerning from a sustainability viewpoint.
4. *Although the existing school sites are the only ones being considered currently, there are likely several other sites that would be stronger candidates.* Because this is such a long-term decision that will drive so many other needs, opportunities and decisions, we urge the prudent consideration of the full range of feasible options.

Although we are fully aware that there are many other pressures and considerations that must be weighed in this decision, we hope these sustainability recommendations might be helpful in the further definition of our community course of action in school development.